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ABSTRACT

The publication "Bootstraps, Part III" serves as a starter for working committees which are formulating a language arts curriculum (kindergarten through grade 12); it allows for additions and changes appropriate for individual schools, contains identifiable strands (such as "speaking") extending through the 13 grade levels, and gives long-range nonbehavioral goals, sample end-of-twelfth-grade objectives, example block objectives, and an explanation of procedure. This paper discusses the creation of this publication, describes the successful implementation of its curriculum-planning method in a Kansas school district, and explores both the purposes and the advantages of the planning method. (JM)

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K-12 Curriculum Planning: Bootstraps, Part III

There may be many ways of planning for curriculum in general and for the language arts in particular, but the following describes the one which several school districts in Kansas have been using, with the leadership of the language arts specialist in the Kansas State Department of Education. This is not to belabor the arguments for K-12 planning. It is rather to present the procedure and the evidence that support it.

Through the years many local schools had tried to cure the ills of their programs by doctoring one fragment at a time -- elementary, junior high or middle school, or high school -- with every suggested remedy: by gathering "great" materials and activities; by coordinating grade levels horizontally; by synchronizing lesson plans based on an adopted textbook series; by designing separate courses of study for the college-bound and the noncollege-bound; by establishing five ability levels for each concept taught; by anticipating the stated or imagined expectations of the levels to follow; by manipulating the schedule, the staff, the walls of the building; by having each student work at his own speed in his workbook and calling it individualized instruction; and by arranging the chairs in a circle. After each innovation, however, they seemed to be like the early flyer who radioed in, "Lost, but making good time."

Few if any of them had established an ultimate destination that would act as a magnetic pole to draw and justify all teaching and learning activities used along the way. Schools and teachers were buried under the "hows" of teaching but had given little attention to the "whats" and

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the "whys." For that reason at least in part, they failed to produce the millenium they were seeking, and within a few years their believers scattered or were looking for a new messiah.

School language arts staffs representing all levels within a district seemed unable to identify desired ends, partly because of the spread of the discipline and partly because of the limitations imposed by certain long-standing assumptions, such as the existence of genetic and chemical differences between elementary and secondary teachers. The elementary teachers immediately requested a segregated meeting in another room; they knew nothing about what adults need to do with language. The high school teachers were silent, wishing to go and grade papers. Endless repetition in the teaching program went on, frustrating and alienating students; concepts continued to be taught where only 20% to 40% of the students were ready for them; and gaps remained.

The state specialist, therefore, undertook to write a destination starter from which any K-12 committee could proceed to formulate a curriculum appropriate for its own students -- undertook it to see whether what she had been recommending could be done. If one person could start it alone, others in groups with specific knowledge of students at different levels could carry it on to open-ended completion.

The first step was to unwind the rope of the discipline into identifiable strands which run all the way from kindergarten through grade twelve. These she stated in the simplest terms as topics. The strands served as a working outline to include the important and exclude the extraneous.

For each strand she formulated at least one -- usually two or more -- long-range goal based on what might be considered a needed or desirable adult competency for anyone exiting from the twelfth grade and going on to college or university, to vocational/technical school or other specialized

training, or directly into the world of work. Each goal is nonbehavioral, in most instances, so that it may have the broadest possible base; applicable to the student's own present and future living; open-ended to suggest life-long growth in the competency; and ranging from the prosaic practical, through enrichment from the worlds of thought, awareness, and social consciousness, to the creative. These goals deal with knowing, understanding, and knowing how to.

For each of the long-range goals there followed two or three end-of-twelve observable -- not measurable -- student behaviors as evidence of the learning stated in the goal. These she called objectives, to distinguish them from the goals. These objectives have several characteristics in common. They are introduced by "The student will be able to-" and are

- observable;
- assignable;
- directly teachable, cognitive and/or psychomotor;
- testable;
- stated in terms of student learning; and
- reasonable for 75% of the students with a 75% degree of mastery, leaving about 25% who require special attention of different kinds.

Even though the two or three end-of-twelve objectives provided only a starter, when the lists were filled out by the teachers of any given school district, they would give direction to and justify all the learnings leading up to them. Activities that did not serve one or more of these ends might be time wasters.

At that point the specialist discovered that she had written her philosophy of education in the language arts. Curriculum committees would write theirs also.

The next step was to break out the end-of-twelve objectives into block objectives, statements of how much or what part of the end-of-twelves approximately 75% of the students could be reasonably expected to be able to do with language by exit from grades 3, 6, 9, and 12 -- or 2, 4, 6, 8, and 12, according to the organization of the school -- with a 75% degree

of mastery. She filled out block objectives for the "Speaking" strand rather completely as an example, beginning at the youngest block and building back up to the end-of-twelves already identified.

The strands, the long-range nonbehavioral goals, the sample end-of-twelve objectives, and the example block objectives, along with an explanation of prodecure, became a publication, Bootstraps, Part III. Part I is an explanation of the suggested procedure for K-12 curriculum planning by a local district without outside help, and Part II provides a self-evaluation form for a K-12 language arts program and department.

No, the valuable affective domain was not forgotten, but there was an effort to distinguish between the learnings that can be taught and those that must be caught. With all the cognitive and psychomotor end-of-twelve material arranged in left-hand columns, in right-hand columns appeared the related, long-range, nonbehavioral affective goals indicating affirmative attitudes toward those learnings, followed by their sample end-of-twelve observable behaviors as evidence of the desirable attitudes. The affective objectives too have certain characteristics in common. They are introduced by "The student might - " and are

- observable, not measurable;
- unassigned;
- not directly teachable;
- not testable;
- voluntary, to serve a student's own purposes;
- characterized by appreciating, being interested in, being curious about.

The publication really does serve as a starter for working curriculum committees. Also, in this format, it provides space to write in changes and additions for their local schools.

Kansas was fortunate that the first school willing to be a pilot was a small district, Riverton, only a few miles from the Kansas State College of Pittsburg. The impetus came from a young teacher of grades seven and eight and her elementary principal. When they asked about college credit

for the project, the state specialist turned immediately to the one person in the state that she thought could work in this unknown way, Dr. Tom Hemmens of the English Department at KSC-P. He graciously agreed to serve as coleader of the group, taking every chance of failure. The local board paid for three hours of graduate credit for each participant, and the pilot project began with twenty-three persons, including every teacher of language arts in the district, the elementary principal, and a school librarian.

Dr. Hemmens and the state specialist met with the group nearly every week for the semester, and three months beyond at the teachers' own expense, plus editing sessions. After each session they held a post-mortem discussion and planned ahead. In the second pilot school they were able to shorten the number of sessions nearly one-third, but in neither pilot school was the affective domain completed to their satisfaction. The coleader team work with Dr. Hemmens was invaluable.

The coleaders worked out or otherwise learned most of the items included here. Additional observations have developed from subsequent projects scattered over the state.

A local committee undertaking the Bootstraps procedure needs the following supports, which are listed in the order in which the need for them became apparent, not in the order of importance:

- impetus from the teachers themselves, based on a feeling of need to "do something about this situation";
- two or three teachers from each block of grades;
- representatives from journalism, speech, and drama if the school has them;
- an administrator as a participant, not as a supervisor of the committee, if possible;
- an interested school library/media specialist, if possible;
- a local chair, preferably elected from the group, with the power to call meetings, make needed arrangements, and preside as the group learns the procedure;

- two volunteers to record accurately the wording of goals and objectives agreed upon by the committee and to make rough copies to distribute at the next meeting;

- a small volunteer subcommittee to edit the compiled material at last before it goes to the final typist;

- consistency of committee membership and attendance at every meeting, barring emergencies;

- a regular place, time, and duration for meetings;

- courage to trust their judgments without use of textbook or other guide material;

- willingness to build each block on the one before without stating "what I expect when they come to me";

- commitment to see the project through to completion, filling out either the total range or selected strands identified as priorities;

- continuing two-way communication between committee members and other teachers within their blocks so that those not on the committee know the progress being made and give their representatives their judgments to take back to the committee sessions;

- snacks at the beginning and throughout each session, especially if meetings are after school when teachers are tired;

- administrative and board moral support, at least, and some community knowledge of the effort, but not publicity.

Student and lay contributions are certainly justified, but having nonteachers present where teachers are vulnerable, for the first time searching the basics of their own profession, stops the teachers from admitting struggle, uncertainty, and even failure with some things. Suggestions from outside the staff might well be solicited before the work begins or as comments on a preliminary draft.

The committee needs a leader who is basically nondirective, usually using questions to maintain direction and progress. Unfortunately, local chairs find this leadership uncomfortable at times because they know the local situation two well. It is working, however, in a few districts.

The committee needs also certain ground rules for its own procedure, for which the leader has a major responsibility, though all committee members assist. The leader needs to

- begin with and maintain focus on the reasonable ideal. Outlaw reference to the present program or text materials being used;
- maintain student point of view, avoiding what the teacher or the school will do;
- maintain focus on the whats and whys, never the hows;
- hold to the structure of student growth, not the structure of the discipline;
- keep the planning vertical, not horizontal;
- maintain the K-12 committee-of-the-whole approach until the teachers can work for short periods of time in block groups without losing K-12 perspective;
- maintain an atmosphere of honest search for truth and consensus, sometimes with individual compromise;
- maintain generalized discussion free from "war stories";
- ask questions that bring clarification, specificity, and validity;
- maintain focus on a realistic ideal for 75% of the students with 75% degree of mastery;
- help supply verbs of observable behavior as evidence of learning and assist in formulating clear, direct statements -- no paragraphs;
- steer generally toward life-time competencies and away from objectives that serve the academic world only;
- maintain focus on exit competencies, omitting all process objectives;
- draw out what the teachers know better than anyone else about students but may not be aware they know;
- refrain from lecturing or teaching;
- offer briefly the findings of some new research study or other applicable information;
- keep the discussion moving forward so that it does not become high-centered on some issue;
- work with the editing committee without counting the hours, and finally
- inquire about the final copy often enough to push the typist to finish it.

What then? The teachers at the elementary levels have little trouble seeing what they have identified as their reasonable ideals for their students. They are glad to concentrate on sound beginnings and not feel guilty. With two or three years in which to bring about these learnings, they agree among themselves what priority responsibilities they will assume at each level, knowing that they have not failed if their students are not all together at the end of each year.

At the secondary levels where there are separate courses, especially mini-courses, the teachers get together to claim the objectives they consider appropriate for the courses they teach. One of their concerns at present is that a given student does not take all the courses and so may miss something vital. Three possible solutions have come to mind: (1) More than one course could take responsibility for the same objective in situations where the student is likely to take only one of them. (2) A master list of objectives and the courses where they are dealt with might be handed to each student early in his high school program so that he may select the courses that will best serve him. (3) Certain objectives, such as those relating to finding and organizing information and to composing for either speaking or writing, might well be incorporated into all language arts courses.

What are the purposes of doing it at all, and of doing it this way? (1) It is an attempt to delimit the language arts discipline for the purposes of teaching and learning. For too many years everything that needed 100% of the student body as a captive audience has been dumped into the English classes, and teachers have graciously tried to undertake all that has been asked of them. In the doing they have sometimes lost track of importances.

(2) It is a shift of vision from teaching to learning, from what the

teacher and the school will offer to what the student needs to be able to do with language. It is to formulate destination direction for teaching and learning, to justify the tributary learnings all along the way, and to communicate to others what the teachers are trying to accomplish and why.

(3) It is to determine block responsibilities appropriate to the students of a given school community. It is to shift learnings up or down on the learning continuum to the places where students can learn them with the greatest learning efficiency, that is, in the shortest time with the least inner friction. It is to say tentatively what, how much, what contributing part will be undertaken when, to replace the endless repetition and fill in previously undiscovered holes. It is to leave each level, including high school, some new, fresh, challenging learnings that have never been ruined by being "introduced" before.

(4) It is to serve as an umbrella plan under which textbooks, supplementary materials, and learning activities can be selected, changed, or originated to help bring about these desired ends, thereby discouraging the propensity to teach whatever each great activity or piece of material is designed to teach. It leaves the how of teaching and learning to the creativity of each teacher, indirectly suggesting that if one approach does not accomplish it, try another. It gives all the teachers the same destinations with their own ways of getting there.

(5) It is to create sorely needed communication and understanding among teachers at different levels. (6) It can serve as a general guide for new teachers and for other interested persons.

Are there both advantages and disadvantages in this procedure? Yes, probably, but some of them are both advantages and disadvantages. (1) One administrator, though he was at first impatient with the time needed for the project, declared later that the "ownership" of the results felt by

the teachers and the school is absolutely vital to making any improvements in the school's program. In fact, every administrator who has participated with the teachers has expressed a desire to use the same procedure in other subject areas and has requested assistance to begin in one other discipline. (2) It builds on a reasonable ideal without benefit of any text or curriculum guide and without reference to what has been or is now being done; beginning with "what we do now" makes it almost impossible to see the ideal. It causes teachers to "check out" something voluntarily in their classrooms and come bubbling to the next meeting to report their findings, a spin-off that immediately confirms or modifies their statements of objectives. (3) Teachers at all levels may feel relieved to be freed of certain things they have always tried but have not succeeded in doing well. Now they can do fewer and fresher things better. Reaching these decisions, however, requires a great deal of time and soul-searching together.

On the other hand, (1) if these reasonable ideals prepared for improving teaching and learning are used instead for accountability, there is trouble for everyone concerned. (2) If the responsibilities are determined for each grade level tightly and measurably, the program could become as badly lock-stepped as before. These must always be kept open-ended, loose-leafed, subject to trial and revision. (3) In a district large enough so that only a small percent of those who teach language arts can work on the committee itself, there is the matter of deciding how to involve the other teachers in feed-in, feedback, and acceptance of the resulting material. Rejection is a real possibility if this is not handled wisely. (4) Even though one may feel that teachers should be willing to do something because it needs to be done, many teachers, realizing that the project will require work and time, want some compensation for their efforts. In response to this request for administrator and board support, schools have so far provided graduate credit, hourly pay, extended contract, professional time,

or public acclaim -- sometimes in combination. There seems to be a way if there is a will.

Those who have been truly involved in the Bootstraps procedure never again look at language arts teaching and learning as they did before -- and this includes the original coleaders.